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AUTHOR Blaustein, Richard
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ABSTRACT

As a multidisciplinary approach, Appalachian studies may provide insights for understanding the context of education in the region. Appalachia is marginal to the official centers of political, economic, and cultural power in the South just as the South is marginal to the core of official power in the United States. In both cases the result is ambiguous identity and conflicting tendencies towards acceptance or rejection of the hegemony--the authority of a dominant elite who establishes society's cultural standards. Questions of cultural dominance and subordination divide core from periphery in any complex society and create identity conflicts that pull marginal, nonelite personalities between the poles of assimilation and separatism. A continuous history of marginality and subordination has left the descendants of North British borderers who migrated to Appalachia with an impaired sense of autonomous identity and self-worth. This ambivalence is compounded by the ambivalence of the core culture towards its own advancement. As in many other places, the "folk" is seen by intellectuals as both a backward illiterate segment of the population and the romanticized remnant of a national patrimony. The selective reconstruction or wholesale invention of folk traditions compensates for feelings of cultural inferiority in peripheral intellectuals. Folk revivalism is only one form that counter-hegemonic movements have taken. In Appalachian studies, the apparent conflict between the "action folk" and the "cultural folk" has become less intense with the growing realization that these positions represent alternate solutions to the fundamental problem of marginality, subordination, and the consequent need for self-actualization. (SV)

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Richard Blaustein
Center for Appalachian Studies and Services
ETSU

HEGEMONY, MARGINALITY AND IDENTITY REFORMULATION: FURTHER THOUGHTS REGARDING A COMPARATIVE APPROACH TO APPALACHIAN STUDIES

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When the sociologist John Shelton Reed stated that "Appalachia has always been the South's South," (1986:42) he deftly identified a key feature of the Appalachian dilemma: marginality.

Appalachia as a region is marginal to the official centers of political, economic and cultural power in the Southern states just as the South as a region is peripheral to the core of official power in the United States as a nation-state. In both cases we can observe ambiguous identity of peripheral regions with a more inclusive official sociopolitical establishment; conflicting tendencies towards acceptance or rejection of the hegemony, that is to say, the authority and legitimacy of a dominant elite which establishes cultural standards for society as a whole.

Culturally speaking, there is no such thing as the "Solid South." Though John Shelton Reed is careful to indicate the limitations of the survey data he presents in SOUTHERNERS: THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF REGIONALISM, it would appear that people who were born and raised in the Border States are much less likely to identify themselves as Southerners (42%) than people from the Deep South (87%) (1983: 13). Despite John Inscoe's recent study of Confederate loyalism in Western North Carolina and Tom Burton's earlier research on Confederate Home Guards in Watauga County, it would be going too far to say that the Upland South has uniformly identified itself with the South; in Reed's

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North Carolina survey, he found that people who disassociated themselves from Southern identity came from all age groups, all social classes and both sexes but geographically they were disproportionately concentrated in mountain and hill areas in western and north central sections of the state which were centers of strong Union sentiment during the Civil War. (1983: 24). Recent studies of Appalachian self-identity by Susan Keefe (1989) and Philip Obermiller (1987) actually suggest that many Southern mountaineers resist any sort of regional or sectional labelling, and mainly to avoid stigmatization. Regardless of all of the other ethnic and racial pride movements which have taken place in the United States since the early sixties, low-status marginal Southern white social types like hillbillies, crackers and rednecks are still fair game for stereotypic put-downs: " Just as rednecks seem to be the last identifiably ethnic villains, so hillbillies appear to be the last acceptable ethnic fools." (Reed 1986:43). As Ross Spears has graphically illustrated in LONG SHADOWS, his documentary film on the enduring psychic effects of the American Civil War, regional and sectional biases are still very much alive in the United States; to quote John Shelton Reed again, "As long as non-Southerners think of Southerners as different, Southerners will be forced to think in these terms." (1983:110).

Throughout the modern world, the vitality of regionalism, nationalism, religious and ethnic separatism has defied the predictions of liberals and rationalists who believed that the progress of science and industry would inexorably result in homogeneous mass cultures and classless societies. Instead, the reverse seems to be happening. In capitalist and socialist nation-states alike, peripheral subject minorities

are challenging the hegemony of elite establishments. The melting pot is melting, the iron curtain is rusting, the domino theory has fallen on its face, while national, regional, ethnic and religious affiliations and animosities have proven to be stubbornly persistant. Many contemporary historians and social theorists are now convinced of the inadequacy of assimilation and mass culture theories. In their place, we are witnessing the ascendancy of models of social and cultural development founded upon the realization that ethnic, regional, and national cultures are surprisingly resilient and extremely resistant to assimilation.

In recent years, theories positing the persistance of British regional cultures in the New World have gained currency in Appalachian studies and related branches of American social history. In part, this could be a response by British-American intellectuals to the assertion of cultural continuity by other ethnic and racial groups. If Alex Haley of Henning, Tennessee can trace his ancestor Kuntu Kinte to the village of Juffure in Gambia, and if art historian Robert Farris Thompson can conclusively demonstrate the continuity of specific West and Central African graphic and musical motifs in African-American folk art, (see FLASH OF THE SPIRIT, Vintage Books, New York, 1984), is it too far-fetched to propose that British-American regional subcultures might be equally resilient?

Though new regional determinists like Rodger Cunningham, Grady McWhiney and David Hackett Fischer concur that British regional subcultures have been preserved essentially intact in America, they are by no means in perfect accord regarding specific historical and ethnological details. In the Winter 1990 edition of the

APPALACHIAN JOURNAL (vol. 7, no.2), Cunningham concludes that McWhiney's notion of Celtic hegemony in the American South as presented in CRACKER CULTURE (1988) is not only simplistic but also accepts xenophobic descriptions of these people by hostile outsiders at face value. Though McWhiney and his colleague Forrest McDonald assert that no less than 75% of the settlers of the hinterlands of the Southern colonies were of Celtic origin, and these people imposed an non-English culture characterized by pastoralism, laziness, intemperance, sensuality and violence and anarchic individualism on their neighbors (1989:1131), Cunningham contends that these people can hardly be considered Celts at all. According to Fischer, most of these back country settlers, English-speaking Protestants rather than Gaelic-speaking Catholics, came from the rim of the Irish Sea including the border country of Northern England and Lowland Scotland as well as Northern Ireland and not from historically Gaelic areas.(1989: 618-21). This non-Celtic North British border culture, transported to the colonial frontier between 1717 and 1775, informed the distinctive character and image of the Appalachian South. Indeed, Fischer would contend that centuries of insecurity and violence on the borders of North Britain resulted in the psychological and cultural preadaptation of the settlers of Appalachia before they ever came to America, just as the historical experiences of the Puritans in East Anglia, the Cavaliers in southwestern England and the Quakers in the Midlands set the stamp on the regional subcultures they brought to New England, the Tidewater and the Delaware. American history is largely a result of the dynamic interplay of these four hearth cultures.

Though Cunningham finds Fischer's version of regional determinism more agreeable than McWhiney's Celtic hypothesis, ALBION'S SEED, despite its higher degree of historical and ethnological precision, is nonetheless flawed by sweeping generalizations and outright distortions which reinforce xenophobic stereotypes in the process of supporting the author's thesis. Fischer's cursory discussions of folk speech (pp. 652-55) and folk magic (pp.708-715) are particularly distressing from the viewpoint of the folklorist; it almost seems as though he has deliberately chosen the most bizarre examples available to demonstrate just how barbaric, cruel and superstitious these peculiar people really are. Are the vocabulary items and superstitions he presents as quintessentially Appalachian (or North British?) as he claims, or would exhaustive research uncover parallels and cognates in other British-American subcultures? And what about the purported xenophobia of the southern highlander? His characterization of Appalachians as anti-semitic (pp. 650-51) seems to be an egregious generalization from the terrible but unique ordeal of Leo Frank; what would a careful study of the geographic distribution of anti-Jewish violence in the South actually show? These may seem like carping criticisms, but what of Fischer's failure to address the ambiguity and diversity of Appalachian involvement in the Civil War? (pp.859-61). Curiously enough, he says nothing at all about conflicts between his four hearth cultures: is this because the actual complexity of the historical event has exhausted the explanatory power of his theoretical construct?

Fischer's conception of persistant dialectic tension between regional subcultures posits enduring, organic relationships between a

people, its homeland and distinctive linguistic and cultural characteristics which is essentially romantic. Exploring the parallels between romantic regionalism in Britain and America is ultimately more informative to the cultural historian than sifting and straining historical and ethnological facts to support a comforting countermyth. Like Rodger Cunningham, we must address fundamental questions of cultural dominance and subordination that divide core from periphery in any complex society and create identity conflicts which pull marginal, non-elite personalities between the poles of assimilation and separatism. In APPLES ON THE FLOOD, Cunningham theorizes that a continuous history of marginality and subordination has left the descendents of the North British borderers who migrated to Appalachia with an impaired sense of autonomous identity and self-worth (1987:xxiii). This ambivalence is compounded by the ambivalence of the core culture towards its own advancement. On one hand, the primitive periphery represents backwardness, irrationality, superstition, sloth, violence; on the other, the core believes that the periphery has preserved values it believes it has lost: the primordial, the natural, organic, traditional, spiritual, spontaneous, sensual and emotional. John Shelton Reed contrasts this peripheral "id culture" with the "superego culture" of the core: "The idea is that members of the group doing the stereotyping project their unacceptable impulses onto the group being stereotyped, and thus deny that they have those impulses" (1986: 45).

Whether we are talking about Appalachians, Celts, vanishing Indians, or any other dominated, marginal group, it is interesting that the qualities which distinguish "superego" and "id" cultures remain

constant, for ultimately they are expressions of unequal power relationships:

(+)		(-)
Dominant	versus	Subordinate
Rational		Irrational
Advanced		Primitive
Hardworking		Lazy
Practical		Impractical
Organized		Fragmented
"Anglo-Saxon"		" Celt"
"male"		"female"
"Apollonian"		"Dionysian"
"superego"		"id"
"left brain"		"right brain"
"core"		"periphery
bureaucracy		folk society
United States		Appalachia

According to this formulation, vanishing peripheral cultures are assumed to be displaced by advancing core cultures; historically, this has provided the rationale for the study and celebration of folk culture and indeed, for the initiation of romantic cultural revivals in general. However, before such revivals can begin, their leaders must resolve their feelings of ambiguity regarding these opposing cultural poles, neatly summed up in Malcolm Chapman's assessment of the paradoxical position of the Highlands and its inhabitants in Scottish culture: "The Highlands have long been derided as the barbarous antithesis of southern culture and sophistication, yet they have at the same time become the location of all of the virtues that civilisation has

felt itself to lack." (1978: 13) Like the Scottish Gael, the Appalachian highlander comes to embody the inner conflicts of core civilization, "at once a fit object for the location of primitive traits , and a fit object for taming, schooling and 'improving.' " (1978:20)

This is true of the folk in general; as folklorist Alan Dundes comments, "The folk is a backward, illiterate segment of the population of which elitist intellectuals are ashamed. On the other hand, the folk represents the glorified, romanticized remnants of a national patrimony which is something for zealous intellectuals to celebrate... the same situation applies in most countries . Intellectuals were both embarrassed by and proud of their folk and folklore." (1989: 44).

Dundes proposes that the selective reconstruction or the wholesale invention of folk traditions compensates for feelings of cultural inferiority experienced by such intellectuals. The reformulation or fabrication of tradition provides a means of shedding internalized stigmatizing stereotypes and asserting a self-defined social and cultural identity. The purported revival or rediscovery of cultural traditions dating back to an unsullied Golden Age serves the same psychological function as countermythologies which reject the core culture's assertion of its own primacy and superiority; the adoption of Mother Goddess myths by feminists or Jesus Was Black myths by African-Americans are salient examples of what David Whisnant has seen fit to call "counter-hegemonic opposition."

By embracing the periphery and rejecting the core, such movements resolve the crisis of dual cultural loyalties experienced by peripheral intellectuals. Functionally speaking, it matters little if the cultural forms which serve as the focus of such movements are

ethnographically authentic or recent fabrications as long they fulfill the need for meaningful, positive social identity. As the British sociologist Anthony D. Smith remarks, the preservation and celebration of the cultural heritage of the periphery serves to bolster a threatened or vanishing communal personality: "The enemy within is loss of identity, self-oblivion, the end of authenticity, which erodes and corrupts the community, dividing and weakening the members and tempting them into cultural imitation and political dependence." (1979: 118). In conquering the inner enemy, which is in fact the internalized conflict between core and periphery, disaffiliated intellectuals are transformed into partisans (or patrons) of the reconstituted folk community: "They go out among the peasants and farmers, commune with nature, record the rhythms of the countryside, and bring them back to the anonymous city, so that rising urban strata may be 'reborn' and possess a clear and unmistakable identity." (Smith 1979: 106).

Folk revivalism is only one form that such counter-hegemonic movements have taken. In Appalachian Studies, we have often commented on the apparent conflict between what Jim Wayne Miller has referred to as the "action folk" and the "cultural folk." In recent years, that division has become less intense with the growing realization that both positions represent alternate solutions to the fundamental problem of marginality, subordination, and the consequent need for self-actualization.

Rodger Cunningham has imaginatively and constructively synthesized these seemingly disparate points of view. As Cunningham states in the final chapter of APPLES ON THE FLOOD, the resolution of the Appalachian dilemma entails "the healing of the divided self." (p.

171). His image of a borderland Merlin awaiting rebirth in his mystic womb-cavern in primordial North Britain evokes Gurney Norman's Divine Right Davenport wrestling with the fiery serpent in the darkness of an abandoned mine on his grandfather's land in Eastern Kentucky; both suggest archetypal rituals of psychic alchemy through which the dross of the false self is separated from the gold of the authentic self and the self-actualized personality is reunited with a authentic, autonomous community.

In the end, it is probably fruitless to argue over the historical validity of the new romantic regionalism; Jo Carson has often repeated George Ella Lyons' contention that the facts and the truth are not necessarily the same thing. And, as Cunningham has observed, the real struggle in Appalachian Studies is not between the action folk and the cultural folk but between the Enlargers and the Enclosers. By making us look at old questions in new ways, Rodger Cunningham is definitely one of the Enlargers. Whether we agree with all of the basic assumptions of the new romantic regionalism or not, it is nonetheless contributing to the revitalization of Appalachian Studies itself.